

Maybe I will jump out the window, Prime Minister. [Laughter]

This is the one day when we Americans remind ourselves that we are the sons and daughters of Ireland, both southerners and northerners, Catholic and Presbyterian, members of the Democratic and Republican party, although we still have a few more Irish on our side.

When the Irish toast each other, they say, "*Slainte!*", which we Americans always took to mean health. But the White House did some research on this, and I am reliably informed that in Irish, "*Slainte!*" actually means health care for all. [Laughter]

You won't believe this, but one of my erudite and overeducated staff members prepared another set of notes for me tonight—all in Gaelic. [Laughter] And I said, "It looks like Hail Mary and the Lord's Prayer." And he said, "That's exactly what it is." [Laughter]

So for a keepsake, I'm going to give the notes to the Prime Minister and say that if I could say but one prayer tonight, it would be for peace and reconciliation in Ireland. This is truly an era of profound change in our world. The Middle East is courageously trying to take steps toward peace. And we are doing our part. South Africa is weeks away from its first nonracial election. Tomorrow, here in the White House, we will witness the signing of agreements between Bosnians and Croats that advance the hope for peace in that troubled region.

Our Nation's long cooperation with Ireland has never been more important than today. In recent months, Prime Minister Reynolds and Prime Minister Major have tried to bring an end to a generation of troubles in Northern Ireland. Both have acted with vision and great political courage in putting forward the historic joint declaration last December. And Mr. Prime Minister, you and Prime Minister Major deserve our admiration and our thanks. And your declaration deserves the support of all people of good faith everywhere.

It is difficult to know what to make of the latest attacks at Heathrow Airport. Like the violence in Hebron or in South Africa, they may be a simple reminder that reactionary forces will always attempt to kill the peace whenever the progress and the prospect of

peace becomes a possibility. The United States condemns such acts, as it does all acts of terrorism. As Ireland searches for peace, I assure you that America remains steadfast in our support.

Our late Ambassador to your great country, William V. Shannon, whose wife, Elizabeth, is here tonight and who greeted us all, wrote a wonderful book called, "*The American Irish*", in which he included a beautiful and touching note on the immigrants who came to America from the shamrock shores of Eire. What did they seek, he asked? The answer is the same for them as for all. They sought a door that would open and give them access to hope.

Mr. Prime Minister, America has always been a beacon of hope to others around the world. But it is your pursuit of peace that is Ireland's hope today. When you return home, I hope you will tell the people of Ireland that we treasure the contributions the Irish have made to our country and its culture. And in return we stand with you, as you seek a door that would open and give all of Ireland access to the hope of peace.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:34 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Message on the Observance of St. Patrick's Day March 17, 1994

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Saint Patrick's Day 1994. On this feast of the patron Saint of Ireland, we reflect on Saint Patrick's bravery and determination in delivering to the Irish people his message of faith and hope for the future—a spirit passed down through the many generations that followed.

With tremendous courage and strength of belief, Saint Patrick helped his native Ireland usher in a new era. Before Patrick returned to his island home as a Christian convert and missionary, Ireland was the last bastion of Celtic Europe. He encouraged the Irish people to adapt their ancient culture and deep spirituality to the new faith that had already transformed much of Europe. By bringing Christianity to Ireland, Saint Patrick her-

alded a new Eire and prepared his people to embrace the changing world around them.

In celebrating Saint Patrick's Day, our nation not only remembers the apostle of Ireland for his achievements, but we also honor the many contributions that Irish Americans have made to their adopted homeland. As inheritors of Saint Patrick's legacy, Irish Americans have strengthened the United States with the richness of their unique history. Blessed with educators and business people, political leaders and people of faith, our nation owes a debt of gratitude to this thriving community from the Emerald Isle.

As Americans everywhere gather to celebrate our "Irishness," I extend best wishes to all for a wonderful St. Patrick's Day.

Bill Clinton

Statement on Signing Legislation on Highway Bridge Retrofitting and Replacement

March 17, 1994

Today I am pleased to sign into law S. 1789—a bill that responds to January's earthquake in Southern California and will help States reduce potential losses from future earthquakes. This legislation expands the eligible uses of Federal bridge replacement and rehabilitation funds to include seismic retrofitting of highway bridges, regardless of whether the bridges are in need of other repairs or work. S. 1789 will greatly assist States in their efforts to reinforce bridges to better withstand earthquakes.

The California earthquake crippled much of the regional transportation system, serving as a sharp reminder of the vulnerability of our infrastructure to natural disasters and of the need to increase our preparedness for such events. The damage to the transportation network in Southern California had far reaching consequences. People's everyday lives were changed because of the difficulty of travel in the region, most notably in the time and effort spent getting to work. All levels of government immediately pulled together to minimize the disruption and resulting economic losses. That effort is continuing.

In my visits to the earthquake-damaged areas with members of my Cabinet and the Congress, one question was repeatedly raised: "We cannot prevent another earthquake, but can we prevent any of the resulting loss of life and debilitating infrastructure damage?" With regard to much of the damage to bridges and overpasses, the answer to that question is "yes." The California earthquake proved that seismic retrofitting works. None of the bridges in the Los Angeles area that were seismically retrofitted failed or suffered major damage as a result of the earthquake. The 12 bridges that were severely damaged during the earthquake had not been fully retrofitted.

The Congress responded quickly by providing much needed additional financial aid to victims of the earthquake through emergency supplemental funds. However, we need not only to provide assistance for repairs, but also to provide the flexibility to allow States to make sensible investments to prevent future losses.

I am very pleased that the Congress, led by Senator Boxer, has acted again to provide an additional tool to California and other States that may face similar natural disasters. This seismic retrofitting legislation does not increase Federal expenditures but allows States the flexibility to determine their own bridge needs. Together, these actions will not only speed recovery from the California earthquake but will also help mitigate potential losses to life and property in any State by future earthquakes.

S. 1789 will empower States throughout the Nation to make critically important investments in infrastructure to prevent highway bridge collapses. Ultimately, it will save both lives and dollars.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
March 17, 1994.

NOTE: S. 1789, approved March 17, was assigned Public Law No. 103-220.